

Remarks Following a Roundtable Discussion With Early Childhood Education Experts in Media, Pennsylvania

April 2, 2002

I just finished a discussion about early childhood development. I want to thank the experts and the teachers and the soon-to-be teachers and those who are running Head Start programs for sharing their knowledge with Secretary Paige and me.

One thing is for certain: In order for all Americans to realize the American Dream, we've got to make sure every child has the necessary foundation to be good readers, good writers, good comprehenders, which means that this Nation must do a better job of focusing our education strategy on early childhood development programs.

We've got to encourage parents to be good readers, good nurturers for their children. We've got to work with Head Start centers to make sure that they've got the curriculum necessary to teach every child the building blocks for reading. We've got to work with States, to encourage States to develop a strategy that will help focus time and attention and resources on the programs that will not only give children the basics for reading but give children the essential nourishment so that they can become ready to compete in the public school system in America.

I assured our panelists here that while I'm spending a lot of time on making sure America is safe and secure, that this initiative is a crucial initiative. It's an essential part of completing the education reforms that Senator Kennedy and Congressman Boehner and both Republicans and Democrats worked on last year and I had the honor of signing.

So this is a great initiative and a wonderful group of Americans that are here to discuss this. I'm real proud of your work. I want to thank you for your care and compassion for our fellow citizens.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:33 p.m. in the Commons/Athletic Center at Pennsylvania State University, Delaware County.

Remarks at Pennsylvania State University, Delaware County, in Media

April 2, 2002

Gosh, thanks for that warm welcome. It's an honor for me to be here today to talk about a subject that's dear to my heart and a subject very important to the country, which is the education of every child in America.

I just had the honor of meeting with a panel of experts from not only the State of Pennsylvania but from around the country: teachers, soon-to-be teachers, people who deeply care about the education of every single person. I want to thank them for their input. I want to thank them so very much for their idealism. And I want to thank you for your commitment to our country.

Three months ago I had the honor of signing what is called the No Child Left Behind Act. It's a piece of education reform, and I believe we'll have—it was the beginning of a new era of education in America. Through high standards and accountability, we're going to make sure that every school in America is ready to teach.

Now we must take another essential step. We must make sure that every child enters school ready to learn—every child—not just one, not just a few, but every single child. On this issue we know what works, and we know our responsibilities. As parents, teachers, and caregivers, we must give our children the lifelong gift of early learning. And today I'm here to outline specific measures to help meet that goal.

Before I do so, I want to say how sorry I am that my wife, Laura, isn't with me. The reason why is because early childhood education has been a lifelong mission of hers. In Texas and in Washington, she is a strong advocate for reading to our Nation's youngest children. She will work to bridge the gaps between scientists, policymakers, and caregivers on this issue. I'm grateful for her leadership. America is beginning to understand why I asked her to marry me. *[Laughter]* A lot of people are still wondering why she said yes. *[Laughter]*

I'm also honored to be traveling today with Rod Paige, who's the Secretary of Education.

You know, when I came to—I was trying to figure out who best to serve in that important position. I wanted somebody who had worked in the trenches. Rod was the superintendent of schools in the Houston Independent School District. He believed in setting high standards for every child and believed strongly in accountability. And his record was a good one, because more and more children were learning. And so I'm honored that Rod took time out of his life to come up to Washington, DC, to serve our Nation, and he's doing a fine, fine job.

I want to thank Dr. Spanier, Graham Spanier, for his hospitality. It's good to see you again, sir, and thank you for being the president of Penn State. I want to thank Ed Tomezsko, Dr. Tomezsko, for his hospitality on this beautiful campus. Thanks for letting us come.

I appreciate my friend the Senator from Pennsylvania, Arlen Specter, for being here as well. Thank you. The Governor of Pennsylvania, Mark Schweiker, is here. Thank you, Governor, appreciate you being here. And I want to thank the attorney general, Mike Fisher, for being here as well. And I want to thank my friend the Congressman from this part of the country, Curt Weldon. I appreciate you being here, sir.

I have constantly reminded America that one way to fight evil is to do some good. If you're interested in helping our country, love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. Today, out at the airport, I got the honor of meeting a fellow named Stan Braxton. Stan used to work for IBM. And he's retired, but he hasn't quit working, because what he decided to do was to help make people's lives better. He works in an after-school program. He provides technical assistance to nonprofit organizations in the Philadelphia area. I appreciate you coming, Stan. Do you mind standing up for a second? *[Applause]* Thank you for coming.

Out of this incredible evil done to our country is going to come some good. I truly believe it. And part of the good is that the armies and the soldiers—the soldiers in the armies of compassion are going to increase all around America. More Stans will say, "What can I do to help America?" Stan is a living example of somebody who puts serv-

ice to mankind ahead of his retirement, for example. And so, Stan, thank you for serving as a great example for our country.

You need to know that even though the subject of today's talk is early childhood development, I am going to be relentless and tireless in our pursuit of justice and to make sure the homeland is secure. We fight for not only the security of our country; we fight for freedom. We love freedom in America, and we will defend freedom at all costs. And we long for peace. We want peace all around the world. In order to make sure the world is peaceful, we must stand strong against terror and rout out terror wherever it exists. And as the war continues, though, it is important for our Nation to remember we have other important responsibilities. As we fight to defend our ideals, we must also work to realize those ideals.

We stand for equal opportunity. It's one of the ideals we believe in, in America. And equal opportunity demands schools that are effective and excellent. We must give all our children, every single child in America, the basics of knowledge and character, and we must leave no child behind. My administration will not be distracted from these goals. As we fight for freedom, I also understand that freedom means no child in America will be left behind. The new civil right in America is reading.

We made a tremendous start in our country when it comes to education reform, because of the hard work of both Republicans and Democrats. I signed a significant piece of legislation that sets high standards, requires assessment in grades three-through-eight, accountability to determine whether or not our children are actually learning. And if they are, we will have the basis to praise the teachers who are working tirelessly to see so. But if not, we'll have the capacity to correct problems early, before it's too late.

This bill offers new resources to schools, a lot of new resources to encourage success and options for parents in the case of failure. Accountability is now at the center of American education, because we believe every child can learn in America. We don't accept excuses, and we want to make sure no child is left behind.

Yet, for accountability and annual assessments to mean something, all children must start school with the basic skills necessary for learning. In order for this piece of reform to really work, we've got to make sure that every child starts at the same point. If we expect achievement from every child, all our children need to begin school with an equal chance at achievement, is what I'm saying. Every child must have an equal place at the starting line—not some children, not just those who live in rural Pennsylvania, and not those who live in urban Pennsylvania or vice versa. Every child—that is the national goal.

From years of research—and as I say, this campus has today hosted some of the great researchers in America—we know what an equal chance at achievement means. It certainly means encouraging a child's social and emotional development. No question about that. But it also means that children, before entering school, know letters of the alphabet and begin to know the sounds these letters make.

They must learn what the written word looks like and must build a strong vocabulary. And they must be excited about reading, because they've seen others do it. The way to make a child excited about reading is for them to watch others read, like their parents. Reading is the foundation for all of learning, and that foundation is built early by exposing young children to the wonders of books and the uses of language. Reading to a child early and often can change a child's life.

Like many parents, Laura and I saw this firsthand. Ever since our twins, our twin daughters, were toddlers, we would read to them at every possible opportunity. Sometimes, when I sleep at night, I think of "Hop on Pop." [Laughter] We found it to be fun, and it's important for parents to understand that it's a part of the responsibility for being a good mom or a dad to read to your children.

But it's more than just fun. It is a vital preschool learning experience. Consider this amazing finding: 10th grade reading scores can be predicted with surprising accuracy from a child's knowledge of the alphabet in kindergarten. Think about that. We can pretty well predict how well a child will read in the 10th grade if that child has been given

a—whether or not the child has been given a good education early in his or her life.

A child who cannot identify the letters of the alphabet in his or her first year of school runs a real risk of staying behind in school throughout her or his career. We cannot accept this in America. To close the achievement gap in our schools, we must close the early childhood education gap in our society. Today I pledge my administration's support in working with parents and families, Head Start and childcare centers, and our States to achieve this goal. Every child who goes to school, every single child, must be ready to learn.

As many of you know, as I mentioned, parents play a huge role, play the most important role. A parent is a child's first and most influential teacher—for many children, their only teacher until kindergarten. For most parents, helping their child learn is a joy; it's not a chore. Yet, learning activities really are not common enough. And we must encourage parents in this essential responsibility of preparing their children to learn. We must help them.

Many parents wish their children came with an instruction manual. All new parents need good information about child development; that's for sure. So later this month, Laura will be launching a series of booklets based on the best scientific research that give suggestions on child development at crucial early stages of a child's life.

I've asked the Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services and Agriculture to make these publications widely available to families with newborns all across the country. These publications will be offered through a variety of programs that serve our Nation's families: WIC clinics, State departments of education, State health and human service agencies.

The White House and these agencies will also have these booklets ready, available online. I want to thank Laura and those who have helped her design these books for working hard to make this an incredibly important issue in America. And all these efforts will promote early childhood learning where it matters most—right there in the home.

After parents, Head Start centers have some of the greatest potential to encourage

early childhood learning. Many of them are already doing a terrific job. We had a chance to hear from one such center today.

Laura and I were deeply impressed by the Margaret Cone Center in Dallas, Texas, which uses a curriculum rich in pre-reading and vocabulary development activities. Before this curriculum was introduced in 1994, graduating classes who left the Cone Center and entered the local public schools scored as low as the 21st percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. After 1994, after this scientific-based curriculum had been introduced, Cone classes have scored as high as the 94th percentile in vocabulary and reading. It matters what the curriculum is in these centers. Head Start centers are a Federal responsibility, and we're determined to encourage the kind of quality that we see in centers such as the Cone Center.

We must focus Head Start on the pre-reading and language development of children, so the Department of Health and Human Services will implement an accountability system for every Head Start center in America. In addition to providing essential health and social services, centers must enhance activities for children to acquire language and number skills. These activities can and should be done in ways that are appropriate for younger children, in ways that work.

Every Head Start center in America must teach these skills and must demonstrate that its teaching is effective. We want to make sure that we understand—that the Head Start programs understand—we know what works. We want to measure the input. We want to say that in return for Federal taxpayers' help, we expect you to be providing the foundation for reading and math.

And to help Head Start centers meet these standards, we'll begin a major new effort to prepare Head Start teachers. In order for this to work, we must give our Head Start teachers the tools necessary to meet our goal. Our goal is to reach the nearly 50,000 Head Start teachers over the next 12 months by giving them the tools necessary to teach basic skills to our children.

This summer the Department of Health and Human Services will give intensive, research-based training to 2,500 early literacy

specialists, who will then instruct Head Start teachers around the country. And starting today, we'll distribute a guidebook for early childhood educators and caregivers. It's called "Teaching Our Youngest." It contains proven teaching activities to help children develop their language abilities, increase their knowledge, and discover a love for books and reading and learning.

We're also asking States to do their part. The Federal Government provides States with considerable funds for childcare. In fact, over the past decade, Federal funding for early childhood programs has nearly tripled. Yet, many children are still showing up in kindergarten not ready to learn. That's going to change.

We propose that States receiving these Federal funds must submit a plan to promote early childhood education. States must take steps to provide pre-kindergarten programs with guidelines on pre-reading and literacy skills, and they must have a plan to expand the training of childcare and preschool teachers in their State.

Just as States care about health and safety of children's bodies, they must also care about the health and progress of the children's minds. I know your Governor cares a lot about that here in Pennsylvania.

Anyone who is serious about educational reform must be serious about early childhood education. If we want all our children reading by the third grade—and that's what we want—then all our children must be ready to learn on their first day of school. This will require Americans to work together—families, teachers, caregivers, civic groups, along with government on every level.

I look forward to working with leaders in Congress on this important issue, especially Senators Kennedy and Gregg, and Congressmen Boehner and Miller. Here's what I think: Where America's children are concerned, there is no Republicans or Democrats, only moms and dads, grandpas and grandmas, all eager to help our youngest citizens succeed.

As we try harder to serve our children better, we ought to keep in mind the wise words of Theodore Geisel—he, better-known as Dr. Seuss, the guy who wrote "Hop On Pop." [Laughter] "Children want the same things

we want, to laugh, to be challenged, to be entertained and delighted.” We want our children, even the youngest children in America, to be challenged and entertained and delighted by learning. This is a responsibility of every parent, and it’s a great calling for our great country.

Thank you for coming, and may God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:43 p.m. in the school’s gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Edward S.J. Tomezsko, campus executive officer, Pennsylvania State University, Delaware County; and Mike Fisher, State attorney general of Pennsylvania. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Fundraiser for Gubernatorial Candidate Mike Fisher in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

April 2, 2002

Thank you very much. Well, “Governor,” thank you for those kind words. I want to thank you all for coming, and thanks for that warm welcome. It’s good to see so many friends. I want to thank you all for supporting the next Governor from Pennsylvania. I’ve been here quite a bit since I’ve been President, but I learned a new fact recently that made me a little nervous. I didn’t realize this, but Pennsylvania has more pretzel bakeries—[*laughter*]*—*than any State in the Union. [*Laughter*] So I decided to take a risk. [*Laughter*]

I love coming to Philadelphia. I love the history of Philadelphia. I love the fact that Philadelphia is the cradle of freedom; that’s what I love.

Mike mentioned Tom Ridge. You know, my biggest job is to defend freedom, is to protect our homeland. And you know better than anybody, I picked a really good man to lead the homeland defense of the United States. I want to thank you for letting Tom cut his eyeteeth here. [*Laughter*] He did a great job as Governor. He’s doing a really good job in Washington.

And I want to thank Mark Schweiker as well. He’s doing a fantastic job as Governor. Thank you, Mark. Pennsylvania has had two fine Governors. It’s time to make three Gov-

ernors in a row. I’m proud to be here on stage with Mike and the future Lieutenant Governor. There’s no doubt in my mind they will both do a fine job, an excellent job, for the people of Pennsylvania. I’m also honored to be here with your senior Senator, Arlen Specter. Thank you very much, Arlen, for coming. I had the privilege of traveling from the University of Pennsylvania, in Delaware County, to the hotel with Jane Earll. She’s solid on the issues. She knows what she’s talking about.

I’m also honored to be here with David Girard-diCarlo and Manny Stamatakis. These guys were my friends before I was somebody—[*laughter*]*—*and I’m proud to call them friend. I want to thank them for their hard work, and I want to thank you all for contributing your hard-earned dollars to this good candidate. I also want to thank the leaders of the political party here, the chairman and the national committeeman and national committeewoman, all of whom are willing to provide the grassroots support necessary for candidates like me and Mike to succeed.

You know, fundraising is an integral part of politics but so is getting out the vote—so is those who are willing to spend a lot of time putting out the yard signs, dialing the phones, and doing all the hard work necessary to make candidates viable. On behalf of a grateful President, and a soon-to-be-grateful Governor, thank you for the grassroots politics here in Pennsylvania.

I also want to thank Carol Fisher, Mike’s wife, for her willingness to make a huge sacrifice on behalf of a good man running for Governor. I know something about good wives. I’m very fortunate to have a good wife, myself. Laura is doing a great job as our First Lady. She is a steady hand. She was a public school librarian when I married her and really wasn’t all that keen on politics. And if the truth be known, she wasn’t all that thrilled about knowing politicians, either. [*Laughter*] But she is where she is, thank goodness. Thank goodness for my family, and thank goodness for the country. The American people have gotten to see why I asked Laura to marry me. There’s still a lot of doubts in people’s minds as to why she said yes. [*Laughter*] But I’m proud of her, and I want